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MY SCHOOL DAYS

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MY SCHOOL DAYS

THE BETTER TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL—1868

Frontispiece

(See page 20)

MY SCHOOL DAYS

Reconstruction Experiences in the South

By

WADE H. HARRIS

Illustrated

New York
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1914

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ORDER OF CONTENTS

		PAGE
Preface		9
CHAPTER		
I	In the Beginning	11
II	The Breaking Clouds	17
III	Poplar Tent	20
IV	Vacation Reflections	26
V	General Lane	32
VI	The Powder Bottle	36
VII	The Dromios	40
VIII	The Rogers School	44
IX	In Reconstruction Days	51

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The Better Type of High School—1868, *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

Getting Rid of Cotton Seed as a Nuisance.. 27

First Cotton Seed Mill in North Carolina—1868 30

Gen. James H. Lane..... 43

Mr. B. F. Rogers..... 50

MY SCHOOL DAYS

PREFACE

The names of the boys figuring in these pages are real. There is small risk. Those that are not dead are too old to fight. It is not a book of fiction, but a narrative of fact; therefore, the use of near-names,—or fictitious appellations whereby the curious reader familiar with the events of the period with which it deals might puzzle out identities,—would be foreign to the intent of the writer. His purpose here is the preservation of some memories of conditions under which the children of the days that immediately followed the Civil War obtained their edution, and, too, that by incidental narrative the schoolboys and schoolgirls of the present day may have a contrast by which they may come to a better appreciation of the advantages by which they are so abundantly surrounded. The author's hope is that the boys and girls,—his contemporaries,—may derive some entertainment from these pages. He will, because of the form of book's dedication, invite a kindly reception for at least one class—the youths who sturdily trod the rugged path of post-bellum education under the guidance of the most original and the most practical educator of those days, the late B. F. Rogers.

I

IN THE BEGINNING

The first molder into whose hands my parents committed the work of giving shape to my youthful mental structure was a woman,—red-haired and red-tempered. She was an importation and had no acquaintance with the families in the town, and,—as we were not long in learning,—no love for the children committed to her care.

The schoolhouse had been a residence; but it had been unoccupied for a number of months, and was in a bad state of repair. It had two rooms, the smaller of which took up about one-third of the first floor. As this room was sufficient to accommodate the pupils, and as it required less wood for heating and less work for keeping it in what passed for a clean condition, it was selected as the schoolroom. The teacher elected to place her chair in the center, with the children drawn about her on chairs and stools. The equipment did not boast even a bench. Twenty-five or thirty little boys and girls answered the roll-call. The oldest was a girl of

twelve years. Individually and in the aggregate the school was personified pinafore.

At first the children thought that the central arrangement was an indication of the desire of the teacher to be social and homelike, but they were soon to be undeceived. The real purpose was to have the scholars within easy reach of the hair-shake for the little girls and the jaw-slap for the boys. In those days mother was the barber. There was but one style of hair-cut, and that was to bob it behind on a line between the ears. The only variation from this style was in the location of the line. Some mothers drew it from lobe to lobe; others half-way from the bottom to the top of the ears, and still others thought their offspring would look better with no hair on the backs of their heads lower than on a line drawn from the top of one ear to the top of the other. This tonsorial effect left a tuft of hair on the head,—a tuft that was an opportunity too inviting to be overlooked by the teacher. If it were a case of a girl's needing to be disciplined, the teacher would content herself with clawing into the hair for a firm grip, and then shaking the little victim almost out of her wits. If it were a boy, she would drag him over to one side of the room and beat a tattoo on the wall with his head. When, on rare occasions, she was lucky enough to have two boys to punish

at the same time, she would crack their heads together, then impel each one to his chair with a smack on the jaw. She never used a switch. No scholar that had ever felt her fingers clawing around his hair for a "purchase" would have stood in any awe of the switch.

It might be supposed that the parents of these tender martyrs would have soon found out the condition of affairs in the school,—and they probably would have made the discovery shortly after Tommy Scott had sobbed out his story of an aching scalp to his mother; but teacher learned that very day what Tommy had told his mother. Mrs. Scott was to blame for that. Next morning the teacher called up Tommy Scott and got a grip on his hair.

"What do you (shake) mean by telling (shake) tales out of (shake) school?"

Then followed more shakes and heartbreaking sobs from little Tom. There was not a trembling little soul in the room that did not hear the dire threats made of what would happen to anyone telling tales out of school; and for weeks the angelic temper of this red-headed terror was unknown.

However, such tactics could be practiced in concealment for no great while. It was not long before pupils began dropping out, mutterings were heard, and reports of the teacher's cruelty began

going the rounds; then the children, emboldened to talk, saw to it that the talk did not lack the element of exaggeration. The teacher's life became so uncomfortable that she was glad to take a vacation,—and from this vacation she did not return.

Naturally, no joyous anticipations of later school life sprang up in the breasts of the little people from the ideas gained through this first disciplinary experience; but reassurance was on the way. The school was reorganized.

There were two women teachers this time,—sisters,—sweet-spirited, and of gentle ways. Janitors were known only as characters in the dictionary, but the new teachers brought over their old colored cook (they lived opposite the forbidding-looking temple of primary instruction), and put her to work scrubbing and scouring, while they took turns at dusting the walls and washing the windows. Then from their own home they moved in chairs, a few benches,—which a day laborer had constructed under their direction,—a couple of desks, and several pieces of carpeting. When school reassembled, the whole atmosphere of the place was changed. The pupils loved the school from the first day. Their timidity vanished, they no longer trembled in fear of the avenging hand, and they turned to their books with a joyous earnestness,—an ear-

nestness in marked contrast to their previous state of mental perturbation.

Under the changed conditions there came a change in the children's ideas of school life. A love for teachers and for books took root in their hearts, and from that time on, the rough places encountered in the first few miles of the path along which these future statesmen and suffragists had been started were as forgotten troubles.

Another thing that added to the happiness of the boys was that the mothers had become a little bit more skillful in the barbering art, and they were not so much ashamed to have anybody walk behind them. The younger of the two teachers got into the habit of bringing a pair of shears to school, and with these she tactfully caught many a vagabond lock that had been skipped because the home barber might not have had time to make a complete job. Then, too, she carried needles and thread in her workbasket. There was a day when the patch on the seat of Billy Swink's trousers was seen hanging down in an awkward way, so she called Billy up, to tell him a story. The school was interested in the telling of it, and when it was concluded and Billy was returning to his seat, none would have known what her hands had been doing but for Billy's temporary halt to make a manual inspection of the job, and his further blunder in turning to the

teacher, bowing rather shamefacedly, and blurting out:

"Thank you, Miss Lillie; thank you, ma'am."

In the delightful surroundings of this primitive seat of youthful learning attachments were made that have happily threaded lives together to this day; for from it there has been a branching out of a forest of family trees. And one attachment, of which the young people were scarcely conscious, has flourished and become the stronger, and as the light grows brighter in the face on the shortening journey, they are privileged to reach out and give the touch of remembrance to the hands that guided their early steps. I meet these sisters yet once in a while, but never without the thrill of tender memories.

II

THE BREAKING CLOUDS

Chaos reigned in the South at the time I was started on the path to knowledge. The echoes of the Civil War had scarce died away, and soldiers were still straggling home. The parents at that time had little opportunity,—and less heart,—to look after the educational interests of their children; yet in the face of the demoralized conditions, it is to the credit of our forebears that one of the first tasks to which they addressed themselves was the opening of schools of one kind or another. The South had been always poorly provided with public schools. The time that had just gone had been the day of large estates and commodious homes, with retinues of servants. The children of the landowners used to be sent off to colleges and seminaries for their education. For the children of the less fortunate class there were private schools and the old field school. For others there was no opportunity, except books in the home. Public schools, as they are known at the present time, did not exist. The best school-

house in the towns boasted but a single room. The old field schoolhouse was no more pretentious; the desk was unknown; the furniture consisted of rows of rude benches; only the better classes of buildings had "window lights,"—that is to say, glass windows; the blackboard was a rarity; everything was in the rough and crude stage of the pioneer days, typical less of the hardship of that period than of the neglect of the educational interests by local and State authorities.

Such being the condition when the people were called to war, it may well be imagined how hopeless the educational task appeared when town, hamlet, and country,—groping and stumbling through the shadows of wreck and ruin and devastation,—came face to face with the problems of Reconstruction. For four years the log schoolhouses had been practically deserted, and had gone to decay by neglect. The country schoolmasters, —almost to a man,—had answered the long roll, or had come back incapacitated by wounds or disease; the faculties of the colleges and seminaries had been depleted, and the outlook for the educational provision for the youth of the South seemed dark.

But the courage and resources of the people rose to the emergency. There were no funds with which to build and equip schoolhouses, but vacant houses were easily obtainable and self-made teachers developed to take the work in hand.

Many of the women entered the service as volunteers, making no charges,—and accepting no remuneration. Some taught school for their board. It was a work of patriotism; and thus did the South address itself to the solution of the educational problem while the pall from the smoking homes still overhung the land.

Out of these crude conditions,—shouldered and gradually made the lighter under hardships, the like of which have been imposed upon no other people of the world,—has grown the present perfected educational structure of the South, built up of a system of rural, town, and State schools, until it forms, as a whole, the finest in the country. Out of the travail of the past has come the Templed Age of the School. The stoic courage, endurance, and determination of the pedagogues that blazed the way to the present accomplishment are worthy of all admiration. The experience of both teacher and scholar was the embodiment of the heroic in human endeavor. In this day there should be no thought for it other than one of honor and of reverence.

III

POPLAR TENT

The excuse for a system of county education that existed before the war had gone entirely to pieces at the close of hostilities. There was no superintendent, no county board, no board of trustees. In some communities the leading men would exert themselves to secure a teacher, but as a general thing, it was the pedagogue himself that organized the school. He would make a canvass of a community in which a house stood vacant, and securing a sufficient number of pupils, would send out word of the coming opening of the school.

In ante-bellum days Poplar Tent used to be considered one of the centers of affluence in our county. It was a community of large estates and big families, and its schoolhouse was of the better type of country institutions; was, perhaps, the best in the county,—in that it had a chimney, four windows, and was weatherboarded. Its interior, however, was barren of ceiling and devoid of

plaster, while paint was an unthought-of extravagance.

The schoolhouse was located in a grove surrounding the church. One would have been told at the time that its furnishings were of the best. The benches in the Poplar Tent schoolhouse were not made to be broken. A pine log, run through the sawmill, made two benches. The process of manufacture was simple. The flat side of the log would be laid on the floor, and in each end of the rounded outer (bark) side would be bored two holes slanting toward each other. Into these holes long pegs would be driven. The pegs were then sawed off so as to set more or less squarely on the floor. The bench was then turned right side up, and was ready for use.

The teacher,—at least, one able to afford the style,—had a chair and table. These he would place near the fireplace. The benches would be arranged in rows across the room in front of him. Upon these benches,—with no foot-rests and no support for the elbows,—the promising youth of that day got a good start in the direction of humpbacked humanity.

There was no idea of sanitation, nor of hygiene. The pupils took turns in sweeping out and in carrying water. The windows were not washed. In summer the boy that wanted to see out could wet his fist and rub a clear spot in the dirt that

coated the glass. In winter it was the fashion to get away from the windows and from the wind that would whistle in through the ample crevices.

A tin dipper, or a gourd, served as the common drinking utensil. The teacher that at that time might have suggested the sanitary drinking fountain, or the individual cup, would have been considered slightly flighty. The dullest man in the community would not swap horses without a close inspection of the teeth of the horse, yet no thought was given the teeth of the children. There was no quarantine against scarlet fever, diphtheria, or any other contagious disease, and a case of mumps was regarded as no excuse for a boy to stay at home.

It was a sturdy set of boys and girls that made up the average country school. They walked from two to twelve miles every school-day, regardless of the weather. Applying the parcel post zone principal as the base of service of the country schoolhouse, we would find almost as many scholars from the fourth and fifth zone as from the second and third. That is to say, as many children lived four and five miles from the schoolhouse as lived within the nearer zones.

At the Poplar Tent school,—barring three or four boys,—none was inside the one-mile zone.

In spite of the difficulty of reaching the school, the record of attendance was above the average

of the present-day city school. Only rarely did a boy play hookey, for the penalty was two lickings,—one at home and one at school. No matter how inclement the season, the scholar that missed a day would need to have a good excuse. Missing the roll-call counted up more demerits than a breach of discipline. A certain number of absences-without-excuse would call for expulsion.

The curriculum was limited, and the little pilgrims were not weighted down with books. Few were further advanced than reading, writing, arithmetic, and spelling. On the last two the country school was particularly strong. Davies' arithmetic and Webster's blue-back were the standards,—and good spellers were turned out in those days. I can recall two things I learned at this country school. One was to chew tobacco. The other was to write a good "hand." The poverty of the people was pathetic to look back upon. Few scholars were able to afford store ink. The common substitute was the ink-ball,—that unique product of the horsefly and the oak tree,—which produced a purplish-colored fluid, having the merit of enduring qualities. The quill pen was an abomination with which the children had small patience. Many of the boys could draw a slit from a chair bottom and with his "barlow" fashion a better pen. The copy book was a few sheets of common writing paper sewed together,

and the schoolmaster always wrote the text. This was generally some popular ditty. From the back of my head comes the first well-remembered copy I was called upon to labor over with tongue and pen:

"My pen is bad; my ink is pale,
My love for you will never fale."

In those days a rhyme would not pass unless it both looked and sounded right. The spelling was a minor consideration. The deprivations of the time were reflected in another way. On the dismissal of school for the day there was no loitering on the playground. The pupils hastened home, where there were turns to do about the house and on the farm. After school the boy was a farmhand, the girl a housemaid. Crops were to be cast, cultivated, and harvested; cows were to be milked, and the chickens had to be looked after. It was by firelight in many instances, by candlelight in others, and in rare cases by the light of a lamp, that the children's tired bodies would bend to the task of study. But the sleep that followed was deep and sound, and the eyes that greeted the dawn knew no heaviness. With the snappy vigor of youth, these scions of nobility were off with the rising sun for the routine of another day, whose exactions they well knew, but of which they were not afraid. There were no "lifts" in an automobile, no rides on a wheel. The monotony of

the tramp was only varied, on occasion, when an empty wagon might be encountered going their way. Did one ever know a driver that did not take as much delight in giving a group of children a ride as it gave them to get it?

IV

VACATION REFLECTIONS

Such were the limited possibilities of a common-school education in the best type of the country school. Vocational instruction was as an idea unborn. Even in the larger schools and colleges there was lacking any appearance of the mechanical equipment considered so necessary to the practical youth of the present time. The textile department was not even a dream. Drawing lessons were luxuries for the children of the rich only, and no thought was given to wood-working. There was indifference to the possibilities of the development of a practical education. Perhaps it was ignorance, perhaps it was the fact that the parents were too seriously engrossed in the greater problems that confronted them in the rehabilitation of their fortunes, to give much attention to the schooling of their children,—quite content with the accepted understanding that they were getting "book larnin'." It had never occurred to

GETTING RID OF COTTON SEED AS A NUISANCE

Facing page 27

them that agriculture should be taught in the school. The minds of the rising generation were directed from the farm, rather than to it, and consequently no thought was given to the immense opportunities awaiting the coming of the magic touch of Science in agriculture.

The slumber of the country over the golden wealth concealed under the fuzzy coat of the humble cotton seed was an instance. My vacations were spent at the home of Jacob Stirewalt, at Mill Hill, where from one forebay were run in succession the wheels of a flouring mill, a sawmill, a woolen mill, and a cotton gin. The latter was my special delight, and I became, to all intents, a "hand" about the gin.

By common consent the duty devolved upon me of keeping the gin-room clear of the accumulation of cotton seed. A door from the floor on which the gin was located opened out over the stream. I had been provided with a wooden shovel, and with this I would dump the seed from the door into the water, whose swirling eddies would carry it down-stream and away. In a season I have thus thrown to waste the seed from a thousand bales. But that was not all. The seed that was not given to the water was burned as the easiest way of getting rid of it. The farmers that brought cotton to the gin did not want to be bothered with the seed. Some would carry two or three bushels

home for planting, but many were even less provident.

The scenes of these wasteful days are as fresh in my memory as if they had occurred but yesterday. It was fascinating to lean from the door of the gin-house and watch the miller start the water wheel. With the raising of the gate in the forebay there would come a tumultuous rush of water, boiling into a white foam. It would leap from one wheel-box to the other until the accumulated weight,—as it filled the boxes to the point from which it took the perpendicular drop, —would cause the wheel to begin slowly turning. As the wheel gained momentum, the flow of water would be cut down to the normal force, and with a musical rumble, the machinery would respond to the motion of the overshot wheel. And as this water came rushing and roaring by the gin-house, it would clear the channel of the accumulated nuisance in the shape of cotton seed. Ah, the golden dollars that were floating away! Had Science come to the schoolhouse a few years sooner, how much more quickly would the South have rallied from the impoverishment of the war! During a vacation season my share alone in the unwitting destruction of wealth in the cotton seed must have amounted to $7,250 or $8,000. But that was merely a small item in the whole deplorable truth. The cotton seed of the entire

South,—now a source of revenue at the rate of $12 and $15 a bale,—was wasted treasure.

But there was a time when the farmers came close to the discovery of the gold mine over which they were walking. It was the idea of cotton-seed meal—an idea that took hold of the mind of a man in Georgia. He figured it out that the seed ground up would produce a meal that would be fine for fattening cattle. After some experimentation he evolved a cotton-seed mill, and came to North Carolina with it. He found an attentive listener,—and eventually a believer,—in Chas. F. Harris, of Concord. Mr. Harris purchased the patent rights, and put up the first cotton-seed oil mill in the State.

It was a primitive affair, and was located in the barn at his home. The mill itself was on the order of a large coffee grinder. At one side of the barn an old-fashioned horse-power cogwheel was built, which was connected with the mill by shafting. The speed was obtained by the vast diameter of the rim of the large cogged wheel and the diminutive side of the shafting cog. Hand labor was employed in unloading the seed from the wagons and in feeding it to the hopper. The process was slow and the result,—by reason of the crudeness of the mill and its failure to thoroughly separate the meal from the hulls,—was unsatisfactory. But the principle of the cotton-

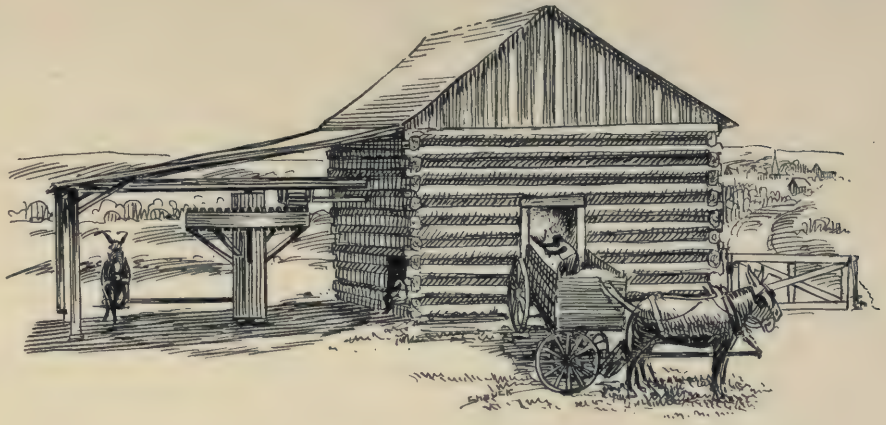
seed oil mill was there, and no doubt the present perfected system had its inspiration from this pioneer effort.

I well remember the first customer at the Concord Cotton-seed Mill. It was W. G. Means, who brought in a two-horse load of seed from his father's farm, three miles west of town. I had been tending the mill and was there when he came for the meal. It amounted to a little over a bushel. Means was mad.

"What," he roared, "is this all the meal I get from my wagon-load of seed?"

He was at length convinced of the sad truth, but his wrath was not appeased, and he never came back. The product of this mill was a coarse, rich, yellow meal, resembling grains of modern gunpowder,—a glistening, sticky, oily mass. The farmers that used it as cattle feed bore testimony to its value as a fattening food and a butter producer. Their only objection to it was based on its expensiveness. Fed to cows in its concentrated richness, it produced butter that very properly became famed as golden.

The operation of this first crude cotton-seed mill is evidence that at that period the light was almost dawning. The application of a little scientific learning would have given the country the meal, the oil, and the hulls of present-day commerce. Let some mathematician figure out



FIRST COTTON SEED MILL IN NORTH CAROLINA—1868

Facing page 30

the extent to which the wealth of the South would have been increased had the groping theories of this Georgia pioneer regarding the possibilities of the cotton seed been followed up to a practical conclusion!

V

GENERAL LANE

Hard on the heels of the soldiers returning from the war, came General James H. Lane, commander of the famous Lane's Brigade,—gloriously identified with the history of a hundred Virginia battlefields,—and whose crowning effort was written at Gettysburg. General Lane's command was chiefly of North Carolinians, and with his fortunes broken, but with spirit undaunted, in the humble capacity of schoolmaster he turned to North Carolina as a perspective field of livelihood. He found the outlook discouraging enough.

He secured a vacant building,—a large barn-like structure,—collected a sufficiency of the rude benches of the times, and opened a high school. His army comrades, to a man, sent their sons to the General, and he had the largest school in that part of the State. It lasted but two short terms, however. The poverty of the people

caused General Lane to reap his pay principally in promises, though his tuition fees had been placed at the starvation point.

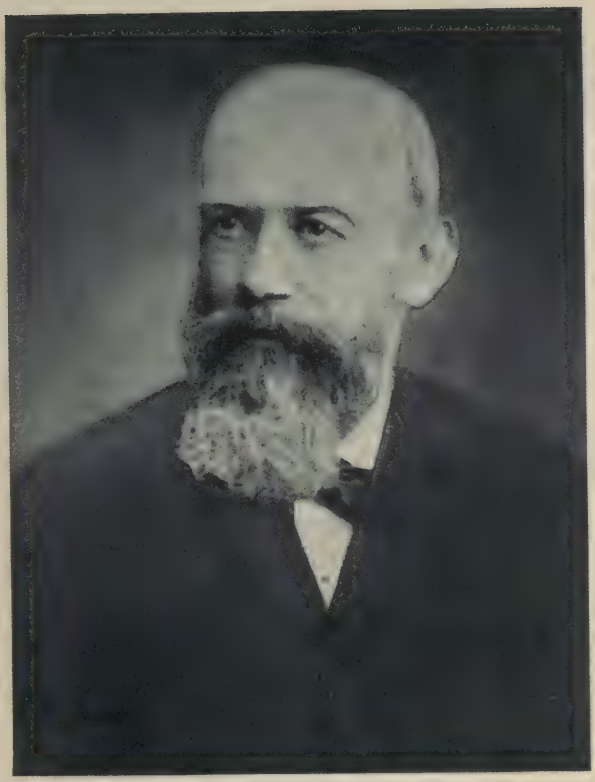
Though gentle at heart, the old warrior's soul had been embittered by the reverses of the civil strife, and he was unconsciously stern and rigorous in his handling of the boys. There were several adults in his advanced class, and to these he gave the soldier treatment. Many of the younger boys remember hiding their faces in terror as the General was castigating some one of the bigger boys. He used a bunch of hickories, and he would stand on tiptoe and come down at a rate warranted to make the dust fly. Only one student ever made resistance, and the flogging was precipitated into a fist fight, which the student,—who came out second best,—no doubt recollects to this day; for he escaped with his life, and is yet in business in Concord. There had been no softening influences to tone down the rugged lines in General Lane's face when the time had arrived for him to take his departure from the field of his first civic endeavor after the war.

The hopes of his heart blasted by the fateful finality at Appomattox, and a pauper in purse, he went forth to other and broader fields.

His strong point was mathematics, and arithmetic and algebra were the standard studies in his school. In Concord he had been given the nick-

name of "Old Figgers"; yet his subsequent career was characterized mainly as a teacher of military tactics, he having been first identified with the Charlotte Military Academy.

The writer came again under General Lane's tutelage at the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, at Blacksburg,—now the Virginia Polytechnic Institute,—and there found that time and the warmer smiles of Fortune had softened his nature, and that off the parade-ground he was as gentle as a woman. Yet, as a disciplinarian, the spirit of the old soldier still animated his breast. The cadets wore the bob-tail jackets of the original Johnny Rebs. The parade-ground was used for training and not for display, and forced mountain marches served to give the boys a seasoning somewhat approaching that of veterans. The iron of defeat was yet in the General's soul, however, and his combativeness was manifested in faculty rows. This pugnaciousness culminated in a rough-and-tumble argument with Professor C. L. C. Minor, on the chapel platform,—an incident that seems to have marked the beginning of a line of subsequent faculty troubles, and to have led to a train of reorganizations that finally caused a change in the name of the institution itself. From Blacksburg General Lane went to Missouri, where he served as professor of mathematics in the School of Mines and Metallurgy, and later went to the Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical College,



GEN. JAMES H. LANE

Facing page 34

where he finished out his life work as military instructor.

It was a characteristic of General Lane that he never referred to the Civil War, nor to its outcome. Whatever emotions may have stirred his bosom, his lips were sealed. He was dumb alike to reminiscence and to incident, and his peculiar aversion to any discussion of the conflict was respected.

General Lane was not a military genius. He had forced himself to the front as a leader by the boldness of his plans, the daring of his actions, the coolness of his judgment, and his absolute freedom from any feeling of fear. He was one of the bravest officers that the South produced, and he wrote for himself a brilliant record on the pages of the history of the Confederacy. Yet this valiant leader of a mighty army turned his back upon the scenes of military glory to face the open door of a country schoolhouse! Of such heroic stuff as this was made the rank and file of the Southern soldier. The land was full of men of such caliber,—men of whom this Confederate general was typical.

VI

THE POWDER BOTTLE

To a class of boys and girls,—ranging in age from eight to twelve years,—the teacher one morning read the story of the Cabarrus Black Boys, whose famous exploit in blowing up a train of powder-wagons belonging to the British army forms one of the most stirring incidents in Revolutionary history.

As the story goes: The British forces were marching through this section of the State, and the wagon-train that carried the powder supply went into camp at a point on the old Charlotte-Salisbury road, six miles west of Concord. A band of patriots concocted a plot to destroy the wagons,—a plan that was carried out successfully. Stripped of detail: The people who had decided upon this blow at the British cause met at an appointed place, and after blacking their faces and otherwise perfecting a disguise, sallied forth to the woods in which the wagons were parked. By stealthy operations they succeeded in laying a

train of powder from the wagons to a safe distance, and to this they then applied a match. The result was the blowing up of the entire train of wagons.

The location of the Black Boys' exploit is historically established, and is frequently visited, —being easy of access. Periodical efforts have been made to have the event commemorated by a monument, though to this day nothing has resulted. At recess that day the blowing up of the British powder-wagons formed the topic of conversation of a group of boys, and their fertile young brains were soon forming ideas. One of the boys remembered having seen a cigar box of powder in a closet at his home, and his announcement of this fact set plans on foot to get possession of some of it. That was easy. One of his companions produced the very thing in the shape of a six-ounce bottle, and with this carefully concealed, the youthful emissary slipped home, got to the powder, filled the bottle, and returned, without having been discovered.

Then a discussion arose as to what should represent the British wagons. Various schemes were suggested, but all were rejected. At length it simmered down to a simple proposition of blowing up the bottle itself. It then developed that the whole crowd was a little band of cowards, for none volunteered to strike the match. The tense-

ness of the situation was at the moment relieved by the discovery that there was not a match in the crowd. That led Caleb Swink into a bit of indiscreet boldness.

"Pshaw!" he boasted, "if I just had a match I would make her go."

He stood committed to do the deed of bravery.

"Wait there!" shouted Harbin Partee, as he disappeared on a run for the schoolhouse, returning shortly with a coal of fire on a shovel. Swink demurred, saying that he had called for a match, but Partee argued that the coal would answer the purpose, and clinched matters by daring Swink to "make her go."

Then began a remarkable performance. The bottle was placed firmly on the ground, and the boys gathered around in a circle. The coal of fire was placed on the mouth of the bottle and Swink endeavored to punch it down with the blade of a knife. After he had made several unsuccessful attempts, Partee forgot caution, and went to Swink's aid. The two boys were squatted on their knees,—Partee sitting rather straight and punching at the coal. Swing leaned back, drew in a long breath, then bent forward with his lips close to the coal and blew hard. Instantly a great balloon-shaped cloud of white smoke ascended into the air, and the Black Boys of history became the little black boys of tragedy. The faces of both

Swink and Partee were terribly blackened and burned. They were carried to their respective homes, and for weeks it was a question whether Swink would come through with his life; and even if he did so, whether or not he would ever see again.

Partee's injuries were less serious; but it was a month before he was able to return to school. Swink's recovery was slow and doubtful, but in the course of time it became known: first, that he would get well, and later, that his eyesight was safe. Then the miserable days I had gone through were turned to days of rejoicing, for it was I who had stolen the powder for the juvenile reproduction of the blowing up of the British powder-wagons. To this day any one having business in the office of the treasurer of Cabarrus County, who will take the trouble to scrutinize the features of the presiding official, will find there souvenir scars that mark the "Black Boys'" incident of his early school days. Partee's family were refugees from the yellow-fever in Memphis. He later returned to his native city, and became a successful man of affairs, though of the fortunes of his later years I have heard nothing.

VII

THE DROMIOS

Bill White was always going around humming Sunday-school songs. "Take it to the Lord in Prayer," was his favorite.

White was built on lines that would have delighted the eye of a Cubist. There was nothing round in his make-up. Angularity and big joints were all over him. He had a way of taking a short step with his left leg and a long step with his right,—his head slightly cocked, and his chin up. He would hum his everlasting songs-without-words until he came to the last line, and then he would intone the completion of the sentence, beginning in a deep, growing bass, and winding up in a sharp falsetto.

None of the boys cared to have White about on account of this peculiar characteristic; but he did not bother any one in particular, except John Burkhead. It was soon evident that Burkhead regarded White as something of a nuisance. Having discerned this fact, White began to manifest a delight in testing Burkhead's nerves. Burkhead was physically a twin for White,—not so

stocky, but a little taller, with the same angular frame and knotted joints. He always carried his head lowered and eyes rolled up into the sockets. He looked as if he were ever ready for a fight; and he not only looked it,—he was.

The two boys lived on the same street, directly opposite each other, and were constant companions. So far as any one ever knew, they neither liked nor hated each other.

White kept up his persecution of Burkhead for several days before the trouble broke out. It was at "big recess" that the climax came. White had managed to cut out Burkhead from the crowd, like a steer from the herd, and began circling around him, humming the well-known song. Burkhead had stopped still in his tracks and, with head lowered, watched his circling enemy out of the corners of his eyes. White had hummed to the last verse, then, singing it out, wound up by smashing Burkhead on the jaw.

The response was instant. Burkhead's big fist landed against the side of White's head with a force that might have floored a mule; but it only jolted White for a moment. Then the two set in to see which was the best man. After each had knocked the other down several times, they got into a clinch, and for the next few minutes first one and then the other was on top,—the under-dog meantime getting a tremendous ham-

mering. The fight was a draw when the two at length rolled apart and began knocking off the dirt and pulling their clothes into shape.

"Now," hissed Burkhead, shaking a battered fist in White's face, "maybe you won't come bringing it to me in prayer again soon."

"Maybe I'll do that very thing," taunted White.

There was still an armed truce between the two when Bill Willitts entered school. This fellow towered over all the boys, and had a fist two sizes bigger than Burkhead's. He soon developed into the school bully. The smaller boys shrank from him with the instinct of self-preservation. Meantime, Willetts had been trying to "pick a fight" with either Burkhead or White,—or both. While neither of these was inclined to put himself in Willetts' way, he took no particular caution to avoid the bully.

It happened that Burkhead was first to take the test. A moment or so after he and Willetts had "mixed," word got out of what was going on, and the school was pretty soon gathered around. When White came up Burkhead was getting the worst of it. Willetts had him down and was pounding him at a terrific rate. Only a momentary hesitation convinced White that it was time to act. He had been pacing to and fro at the long-and-short-step gait, humming his favorite

song, when suddenly he shouted out the line:

"'Take it to the Lord in Prayer!'"

And at the words he landed on Willetts' back with a pile-driver lick.

Willetts raised up to see what had hit him, when Burkhead quickly slipped from under him and joined White on top. The two had the bully at their mercy and literally battered his face into the ground. When they ceased the punishment and permitted Willets to get to his feet, a thoroughly conquered bully slunk from the school grounds,—and was seen no more.

After this encounter there might have been expected some manifestation of feeling on the part of either Burkhead or White; but there was none. It was noted, however, that White never again hummed the particular song that had irritated Burkhead, but he acquired a new habit: He gave the school the benefit of his full repertoire.

And the boys actually got to loving him for it.

VIII

THE ROGERS SCHOOL

The reconstruction of the common school system had its beginning with the coming of Mr. B. Frank Rogers, who later became one of the most successful elements in the commercial life of our section of North Carolina.

Mr. Rogers was the antithesis of General Lane, of whom he was the immediate successor in the educational field. The Rogers *régime* was one of sunshine and laughter. There was never a dull day in his school. Gifted with great originality and an infinite sense of humor, he injected into the daily routine of school life a spirit of optimism and cheerfulness, which tended to make the Rogers schoolhouse an attraction that combined education with entertainment. The latter was reciprocal,—each scholar contributing to it as the inspiration might strike the teacher. As in the cast of some modern opera troupe, there were stars for the leading parts and lesser lights

for the minor rôles; but every scholar was an actor.

Mr. Rogers never used the rod in the general acceptance of the term. His desk was always littered with a collection of crooked cedar stubs, —a little thicker than a lead pencil and about two feet long. It was through the unique use of these stubs that he kept the school in a good humor. Sometimes a boy would be deeply engrossed in some occupation,—an employment that the teacher had observed was not connected with the studies of the day,—and would be aroused by a resounding whack on the head. Looking up, he would find the teacher laughing into his face at his pained surprise, and ready to raise another knot by way of dismissal.

On occasion,—when some "stalled" student would be arraigned at his deck for assistance,— books were forgotten, and attention was riveted upon the proceedings. The teacher would use the stick for making punctuation marks. During the performance the boys would take advantage of their understood privilege of giving expression to their enjoyment of the entertainment; but if any one were unseemingly boisterous, he would be called to the desk, and himself put through a performance. Mr. Rogers' originality was of a practical bent. There was never a day at school when he failed to discuss some event of

current interest. The important news in the daily paper would be read and commented on, and an interest was created in the political questions and the economic issues of the times. The most commonplace incidents of the school-room would be turned to account.

There was one day when the teacher happened to ask a scholar on a rear seat this random question:

"How many days are there in this month?"

The question was addressed to Lafayette Brown, and he responded:

"I dunno."

The school was at once all attention, for it intuitively knew that something was coming.

"General Washington Lafayette Bonaparte Brown," called out the teacher; "come up here!" and Brown marched to the desk.

"Don't know how many days there are in this month, eh?" And Mr. Rogers reached for a stick.

"Thirty days hath April—" Brown had begun in desperation; but the teacher stopped him.

"None of that Mother Goose nonsense," came the warning. "Hold out your fist!"

Brown obeyed, and responding to the command, presented his fist, knuckles up; whereupon Rogers explained to the school how to tell the number of days in each month in a way in which

no mistake could be made. Whack! went the stick on the first knuckle of Brown's fist.

"That's January, and it has 31 days," said the teacher.

Then he proceeded to show that, counting down the knuckles the top of each one represented a month with 31 days. The spaces between represented a month of 30 days, this holding good with the exception of February, with its 28 days in common years and 29 days in leap years.

There was not a boy in the school who failed to grasp the utility of this method of accounting for the days in the month.

One day the class in hydrostatics had a problem in atmospheric pressure,—a problem that seemed difficult of explanation even by demonstration on the blackboard. Finally Mr. Rogers hit upon an expedient. He filled a glass with water and placed it on his desk. Then, with a good deal of patience and no small degree of skill, he fashioned a siphon from two straws, giving one long arm and one short one. The short arm he placed in the water and instructed one of the boys to "give a pull" at the end of the longer straw with his lips. This was done, and the water was seen to flow up the shorter straw and out through the longer arm, until the glass was emptied. This practical demonstration of how water can be made to run up-hill by simple pres-

sure of air, gave interest to the study of hydrostatics by the school.

It was a lazy, dreamy summer day when Jim Cook got his name of "Jiggers,"—a name that sticks to him to this day. Cook had been blackberrying with me and the girls, and all the morning at school was in a restless state,—scratching his arms with both hands and rubbing his shanks, first with one foot and then the other as high up as the foot could reach.

Mr. Rogers had been watching him with some curiosity, and at length called out: "Cook, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothin'," was the response, "'ceptin' these here jiggers is a-bitin' me."

The teacher led in the laughter, and the school felt that fun was in the air when he summoned Cook to the front.

"Come up here, Jiggers," was the command.

Cook was placed on the platform and there was a little sport with the stick, during which, for the school's amusement, there was drawn from the boy a detailed story of the blackberrying expedition, after which he was made to bare his arm. The teacher then produced a microscope and invited the school to line up. There followed an instructive talk on the "chigger,"—its habits, characteristics, and how to get rid of it. Cook was told that in shaking blackberry bushes, he

dislodged quantities of these parasitic mites, and that some of them had fallen on his arms and hands and had been scattered over his body, burying themselves under the surface of his skin. There they had become gorged with blood, which caused the irritating sensation that had aroused Cook to so vigorous a state of activity.

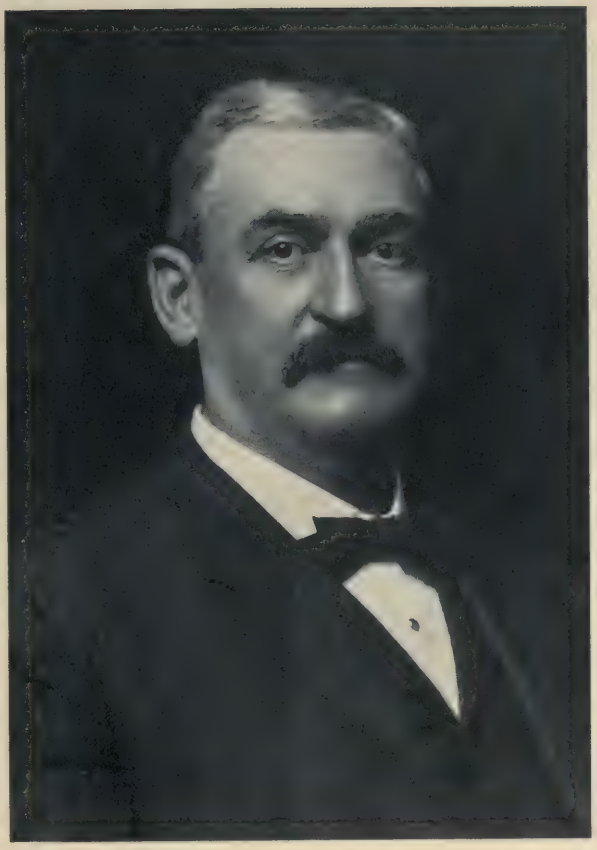
The pupils were given a study of the little red bug under the microscope, and after all had witnessed it in operation, they were told of the most approved method of getting rid of the pest. One of the boys was sent to a drug store for a phial of ammonia, and Cook's arm was rubbed with a rather strong solution. It had the desired effect. Cook was then given the phial and sent home with the advice to make a thorough job.

So it went from day to day in Rogers' school: always some practical demonstration of incident, or event of easy grasp by the pupils, by means of which was imparted knowledge never to be forgotten.

It was not to be wondered at that Rogers' School leaped into early and lasting fame. From a modest beginning, with but a small group of neighborhood boys, it became renowned for miles around, attracting a scholastic personnel that was not excelled in the State.

The best testimonial of the splendid work that B. Frank Rogers performed as an educator is

found in the ratio of successes to failures that he turned out. Eighty per cent of Rogers' boys are successful men of affairs to-day,—business and professional men,—who, but recently called upon to mourn him dead, paid him tribute as friend and guide and counsellor invaluable.



MR. B. F. ROGERS

Facing page 50

IX

IN RECONSTRUCTION DAYS

Since deciding to have these sketches put into print, I have concluded that the object of the work would be materially advanced by incorporating the following bit of Reconstruction data, taken from a letter by my mother,—Mary Annette Harris,—to her daughter, Mrs. James F. Shinn,—a letter that was read at a meeting of the Norwood Book Club. The experiences narrated were common all over the South among the dwellers in the county. The incidents of Reconstruction government will serve to give a clearer idea of the difficulties under which the Southern people took up the task of educating their children, and the discouragements under which they labored, to lay the foundation of the present educational structure of the South.

"The Reconstruction period in the Southern States began with the surrender of Gen. Robert E. Lee, at Appomattox, and ended with the rein-

statement of the South into the Union in 1870,—though active measures for this event were not before Congress until 1867. In the meantime the people of North Carolina had been under military rule,—first under General Schofield and then under General Canby; with W. W. Holden appointed Provisional Governor by President Andrew Johnson. General Scofield's first act was to issue a proclamation of freedom to every slave in the State. It is impossible fifty years after to so write as to give the present generation of young people a realizing sense of the disorder, the painful surprises, and upheaval in the domestic relations between master and servant in every home.

"Your father came straight from the field at Appomattox to our home at Sandy Ridge, near Concord; and there we remained through the Summer, with no money and scant provisions. Enough of our field hands stayed to work the corn and cotton, which had been planted before the surrender and were then up and growing. Martha, our cook, had disappeared,—taking all her children but one,—Lize,—who was left to nurse the baby. She, too, in a few days vanished suddenly, taking the road for Concord, to complain to the Freedman's Bureau that I had slapped her, which, for once, was the truth. I had not become accustomed to deliberate disobedience on

the part of servants. Your grandmother sent us from town one of her old servants,—Aggie,—to cook for us; but Aggie had never been allowed to do a full day's work, being too old to be so burdened. However, she did more and better than I had expected, until (alas!) the wagon sent to town in the morning came back in the evening with a dried-up specimen of humanity in it,—Aggie's mother, who had come from somewhere up the North Carolina Railroad to live on her daughter's 'Forty acres and a mule.' The land and mule not being in hand, both mother and daughter got away somehow without saying goodbye.

"A regiment of Federals camped during the Summer at Winecoff's grove and overran the country, trading their good coffee and sugar for buttermilk and onions. We got our first real coffee from them. The Freedman's Bureau was established in every town, to hear complaints of the negroes in the Summer and to compel the owners of the land to give them a share of the crops in the Fall. The officer in charge of the bureau in Concord was a young man that had lost an arm in the war. He had been married only a few months, and had brought his wife with him; and being afraid of being poisoned at a hotel or private boarding house, they rented rooms, hired a negro cook, and went to house-

keeping. The officer's wife suffered the terrors of death every time he would go into the country, being sure some awful Southerner would murder him.

"So passed the Summer, and by orders from Washington, an election was held in October to restore civil government in the State. Jonathon Worth, of Randolph County, was elected Governor,—defeating W. W. Holden,—and held office for two years.

"The people were beginning to feel that they could breathe easily, when, in 1868, another election was ordered. The Convention and the elections of this year brought a culmination of our troubles. Every negro of twenty-one years and over was given the ballot; and 20,000 white men, property-holders, responsible for the good government of the State,—men intelligent, versed in literature and political economy,—men of uprightness, who had all been Confederate soldiers as well,—were denied the right to vote, while the negro field hand, the hostler, and the carriage driver (to whom the alphabet was a puzzle and who could not read a syllable of his ticket) were ushered in at the polls to drop the ballot in the place pointed out to them. Moore's 'History of North Carolina' gives the reason why the Convention of 1868 was ordered so soon after that of 1865.

"This first Convention of October 'passed ordinances repealing the ordinance of secession of May 20th, 1861,—the abolishment of slavery and invalidating all contracts made in furtherance of the war. The people refused to ratify these ordinances; and, while accepting the situation and submitting in all quietude to the authorities imposed, they were yet resolved to take no part in these constrained reformations.' The Legislature of 1868 was composed principally of negroes, scalawags, and carpetbaggers. The State was at their mercy. 'The reckless expenditure produced the utmost excitement among the tax-payers and soon resulted in such a strain on the State's credit that her obligations became wellnigh worthless in the stock markets.'

"This hybrid Legislature issued millions of bonds, which it succeeded in selling,—and which the State repudiated,—but which are yet bobbing up here and there to remind the world that rascality once had North Carolina by the throat. The negroes,—excited by their new-found freedom, and incited by their new-found friends,—organized the Union League, to see how much mischief they could do (and how little work); thus becoming dangerous to life and property. This accounts for the sudden and terrifying appearance of the Ku Klux Klan, whose ghostly figures soon disbanded the League. But before the League fell

to pieces, many depredations and outrages were committed. These were summarily punished by the Ku Klux Klan. Governor Holden issued repeated orders demanding the cessation of violence. At length, when a negro legislator,—Stephens by name,—was murdered in the courthouse at Yanceyville,—murdered so mysteriously that the perpetrator was never discovered,—the Governor, under authority of the Shoffner bill, called out troops, under command of George W. Kirke, of Tennessee.

"'In a few days, more than a hundred citizens of Alamance, Caswell, and Orange counties were arrested and imprisoned. Among this number was Josiah Turner, editor of *The Raleigh Sentinel*. He had daily, in righteous indignation, 'dipped his pen in vitriol,' and in biting sarcasm and ridicule, exposed the infamous proceedings among the law-makers of North Carolina. The readers of his paper will never forget the fearless editorial, which would have brought the blood, like a whip-lash, to a sensitive man's face. These soldiers under Kirke, were called 'Kirke's Lambs,' in contemptuous irony of their brutality in the treatment of the prisoners in their power.

"For bringing troops into the State in times of peace, Governor Holden was impeached, found guilty, and declared incapable of holding any further honor or dignity in the State. Lieutenant-Governor Todd R. Caldwell, of Burke County,

took Holden's place as governor. Caldwell died while in office, and was succeeded by his lieutenant-governor, Curtis H. Brogden, of Wayne County.

"By 1870 the best people of the State had got upon their feet again, and in the election of 1872 sent Gen. M. W. Ransom and Judge Merrimon to the United States Senate. In 1877, our 'War Governor,—Zebulon B. Vance,—was reëlected governor by an overwhelming majority. North Carolina had come into her own again.

"All that the hatred of the North could do to ruin the South had been done, but neither intended humiliation nor actual spoliation could crush the manhood of her sons; and, in the superiority of their Southern blood, they have arisen and made the South what it is to-day. We can well rejoice that we are the most coveted section of the Union, blessed with abounding prosperity, —our people God-fearing, law-abiding, peaceful, and contented, happy in the manifold mercies and advantages of what has been so well called 'God's Country.'"

THE END

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